DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 897 CS 503 952

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TITLE Listening Instruction in Texas Institutions of Higher Education.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Speech TX, October 7-9, 1982). Communication Association (Houston, TX, October 7-9, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Curriculum; Course Descriptions; Higher Education; *Listening Skills; *School Surveys; *Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

To obtain feedback regarding listening instruction at the universities, colleges, and junior colleges in the state of Texas, this study surveyed 100 schools listed in the 1982 Speech Communication Directory. Department chairpersons of each school received a listening checklist and, as a follow-up procedure, registrars of the schools were sent a letter requesting information about speech communication courses offered at their respective institutions. The checklist was completed and returned by 50 of the schools contacted, and 65 of the schools responded to the request for course information. Responses indicate that while 47 of the schools were not currently offering a course in listening, some did indicate a willingness to do so. In response to the question, "Is listening instruction included in other courses in your curriculum?" 37 respondents said "yes" and listed a wide variety of courses. Listening instruction was most frequently offered in a fundamentals of speech course followed by, in order of frequency mentioned, business and professional speaking, interpersonal communication, public speaking, and communication for teachers. Seven of the 50 respondents indicated listening instruction was included in the curriculum of other departments, schools, or divisions of their respective college or university. Most of the listening instruction included an overview of the nature, definition, role, and responsibilities of effective listening; a contextual approach; and use of experiential learning techniques in the form of assignments and listening labs. (HOD)

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LISTENING INSTRUCTION IN TEXAS INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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LISTENING INSTRUCTION IN TEXAS INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The significance of coursework in communication has repeatedly been validated through various surveys during the last decade.[1] Communication faculty need not be reluctant to claim communication courses contribute to occupational success[2] and provide skills used in a wide variety of occupations.[3]

The abundance of consulting firms and educational materials devoted to the topic of communication likewise underscore the importance of communication education/training. However, the subject of listening as a communication skill seems to appear far more frequently in consulting/training materials than in the college and university curriculum.

Furthermore, it appears that as the importance of listening has increased in the development of contemporary communication theory, listening instruction has not increased. Although interaction[4] and transaction[5] models of communication emphasize feedback and the simultaneity of sender and receiver roles, listening is still perceived as a natural process requiring no training.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the present study was to obtain feedback regarding listening instruction at the universities, colleges and junior colleges in the state of Texas. Only schools listed in the 1982 Speech Communication Directory were

included in the survey. A total of 100 schools were designated as the survey sample; however only 97 schools actually received the survey as a result of mailing label errors. Each school was contacted by mail through the department chairperson. Each chairperson received a copy of the Listening Checklist accompanied by a cover letter requesting his/her participation or willingness to refer the survey to the appropriate person. As a follow-up procedure, registrars of the above mentioned universities, colleges and junior colleges were sent a letter requesting information about speech communication courses offered at their respective institutions. Again, mailing label errors reduced the survey sample to 97 schools.

The Listening Checklist was completed and returned by fifty-two percent, or 50, of the schools contacted. Sixty-seven percent, or 65, schools contacted responded to the request for course information. Results for the five major questions on the Listening Checklist are summarized below. For a copy of the Listening Checklist write the author.

RESULTS

While most (94% or 47) of the respondents indicated they were not currently offering a course in listening, some did indicate a willingness to do so. In response to the question, "Are you planning to offer a course in listening in the future?" sixty-six percent or 33 of the respondents said no, twenty-two percent or 11 said possibly and twelve percent or 6 respondents said yes. Some willing respondents

were doubtful, however, that the administration would approve such a course.

In the question, "Is listening instruction included in other courses in your curriculum (in the form of units, special study topics, etc.)?" respondents were asked to list specific courses. Seventy-four percent, or 37 respondents said yes and listed a wide variety of courses, including several multiple listings in any given department. Listening instruction was most frequently offered in a Fundamentals of Speech Communication course followed by, in order of frequency mentioned, Business and Professional Speaking, Interpersonal Communication, Public Speaking, and Communication for Teachers. Although rarely, listening instruction was also included in Voice and Diction, Small Group Communication, Communication Theory, Acting, Communication for Health Professionals, Persuasion, Non-verbal Communication, and Teaching English as a Second Language.

Students, though, may not be aware of the frequency of this type of listening instruction. Of the 65 schools who responded to the request for information concerning speech communication courses, only fifteen percent, or 10 schools mentioned "listening" or "receiver skills" in their course descriptions. Two of those descriptions were for Listening Courses.

Seven of the 50 respondents indicated listening instruction was included in the curriculum of other departments, schools or divisions of their respective college or university.

Listening instruction was provided in Reading courses, English courses and Business courses.

Listening instruction seems to be a part of a diverse spectrum of education other than formal courses in departments of speech communication. Respondents listed the counseling center, freshman orientation, continuing education, human resource management seminars and individual corporations as sources of listening training. A few respondents indicated they used tapes and modules on listening developed by some of the above sources or developed their own. One respondent felt "listening instruction is not valid in the junior college curriculum."

Finally, additional information derived from the Listening Checklist included course materials used in various forms of listening instruction. A review of those materials indicated certain aspects that were common throughout. Most listening instruction included: (1) an overview of the nature of, definition of, role of, and responsibilities of effective listening, (2) a contextual approach and (3) use of experiential learning techniques in the form of assignments and listening labs.

CONCLUSIONS

Listening courses do not seem to be in the main stream of Speech Communication curricula of colleges and universities in the state of Texas. The possibility that will change any time in the near future seems doubtful. On the other hand, listening instruction seems to be an important part of most

Speech Communication courses that are in the main stream, whether they be theoretical or practical. However, the presence of listening instruction in these courses appears to be a "well-kept departmental secret" due to the lack of college catalogue information on the topic.

Furthermore, listening instruction runs the gamut of educational format from freshman orientation to corporate seminar. Although these findings can be interpreted in a variety of ways, they may be saying that in Texas, either (1) listening instruction is important, just not important enough to merit a formal course on the junior college , college and/or university level or (2) that listening instruction is of theoretical and practical significance in specific contexts. Further research needs to be done on listening instruction throughout other college and university systems before any global conclusions can be made.

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[3]Sandra E. O'Connell, "Career Options in Organizational Communication," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, No. 18 (October, 1976), 31-33.

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[5]Karen Rasmussen, "A Transactional Perspective," in Persons Communicating, ed. Donald K. Darnell and Wayne Brockriede (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 28-31.